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The Detroit News Pictorial for April 17, 1938

Nut Trees for Michigan



Corsan transplanting a three-year-old Circassian walnut tree grown on his Islington, Ont., farm from Russian seed.



George H. Corsan points with his pruning shears to where a Circassian English walnut tree has been grafted to a black walnut tree. Corsan calls shade trees "weed trees" because "all they produce are leaves and a poor quality of wood. Nut trees," he adds, "are beautiful, give shade, furnish an easily marketable crop and produce valuable wood when through bearing."

Giant Circassian and hickory nuts grown on Corsan's farm.



Japanese heartnuts, much like our butternuts. The tree grows very fast.



A burr full of Chinese sweet chestnuts.

By Russell Gore

HOPE for some of Michigan's "Ten million idle acres" of former pine-lands is held out by the experimental planting in the southern part of this state of exotic nut trees usually associated with warmer climes.

Special attention is being paid to the paper-shelled English walnut that forms so large a part of California's nut crop. Pecans, pawpaws, Japanese heartnuts and even persimmons are among the many varieties being planted both on farms and estates and at the University of Michigan arboretum.

Preliminary experimental work, covering a period of 20 years, has been done by George Hebden Corsan, former Michigan resident, in his nut plantation at Islington, near Toronto, Ont. Here, in a climate similar to that of Michigan below Saginaw on the east and Muskegon on the west, he has produced more than 300 varieties of nuts.

Prominent among Corsan's exotics is the paper-shelled English walnut, the Circassian. This tree heretofore has taken many years to mature. But Corsan has evolved a variety that grows from seed to bearing stage in from six to seven years, and matures even more rapidly when grafted on the native black walnut of Michigan woods. It is the only one of the 110 named varieties that can be adapted to northern climes.

Another exotic is known as the "Hican," a southern pecan grafted on the native hickory. Its nuts are sweeter because ripened by frost. An Asiatic being introduced here is the blight-resistant Chinese chestnut.

Corsan, swimming instructor for all California Army, Navy and Aviation camps during the World War, and later for the national Y. M. C. A., studied trees and birds as a hobby. A lecture he delivered before a Battle Creek audience inspired W. K. Kellogg to create the Bird Sanctuary now operated under his name by the State of Michigan. Corsan planted, stocked and for five years managed the sanctuary. In June, 1931, he established a bird sanctuary on the San Gabriel River in California.



The famous Asiatic tree hazel, a very hardy tree that will grow from 120 to 200 feet high. The nuts are larger than native hazel nuts. "Michigan once had many nut trees," says Corsan. "They were cut down to make ax handles and whiffle-trees. But they can, and should, be reintroduced."

This tree is nine years old.

Michigan Soil and Climate Suited to Wide Nut-Tree Culture

Experiments Prove Trees Will Thrive

Former Resident of Michigan Grows 300 Varieties of Nuts on Ontario Reserve

By ALBERT STOLL, JR.

Near the little town of Islington, Ontario, not far from Toronto, George Hebden Corsan, a former Michigan resident, has been carrying on experiments in the culture of nut trees that perhaps is without parallel in this country. It is unique in that he has succeeded in growing exotic nuts never before attempted, and through grafting and cross fertilization has produced numerous hybrids. Corsan at one time had charge of the Keweenaw Migratory Bird Sanctuary, near Battle Creek, and had carried on a number of experiments in nut tree culture there. Twenty years ago he purchased 20 acres of fertile land just out of Islington, placed it under the charge of an assistant and started planting nut trees on an extensive scale.

Today his results of 20 years of experimentation has brought him over 300 different kinds of nuts, most of them highly palatable and easy to raise on the type of land found in Michigan south of the Saginaw-Muskegon line.

RAISES SEEDLINGS

In addition to nut tree planting Corsan also conducts his own tree nursery where the small seedlings are raised for his plantations. One year this nursery produced 22,000 black walnut, 4,000 Circassian walnuts and 2,000 giant hickory seedlings, many of which were disposed of commercially to those interested in tree culture.

In planting the nuts themselves to produce trees, Corsan says that they should first be stratified by placing them in wet hay or moss on the ground in fall and planting them in spring. In sandy soil they should be placed at least two inches underground, but in rich soil one inch is sufficient.

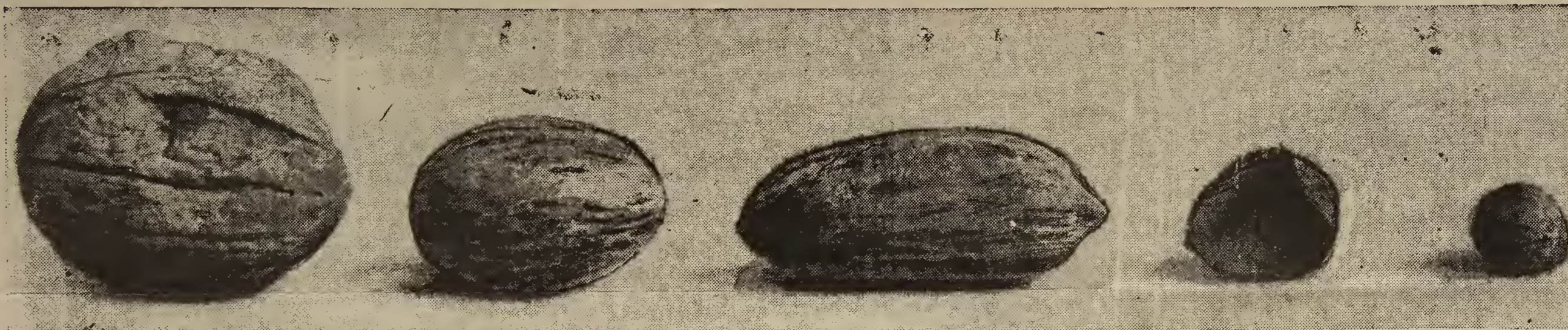
"Experimenting in crossing different varieties has produced some interesting results," said Corsan. "For instance, the native black walnut crossed with the English walnut should have produced a fine nut, but instead I only got a poor meated nut. One of my finest flavored nuts is the Japanese heart-nut, producing a single meat. I have the finest butternut flavor imaginable."

I have one tree upon which 12 different varieties of nuts are growing. This was produced through grafting. My shortest-lived tree is the hard-shelled almond which rarely lasts over 30 years, while the Chinese hazel will live and produce for as long as 400 years, reaching a height of 200 feet. Likewise, the Circassian walnut will live for 250 years, and grows from 75 to 125 feet high.

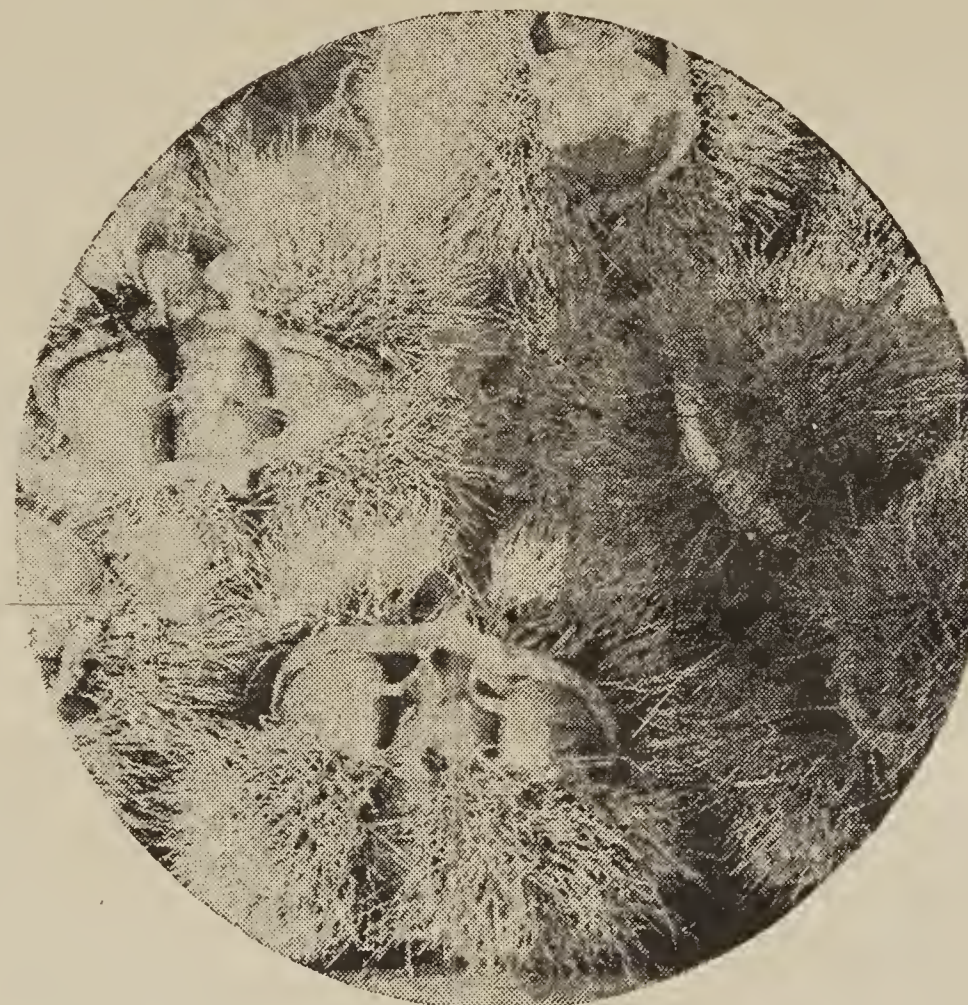
KIND OF SOIL

When asked just what kind of soil was best suited to nut culture Corsan said: "Some want a lime soil, other highly acid. This can be determined through experimentation. I have found that the American chestnut will not live in any kind of soil, for it seems destined to die of the chestnut blight shortly after it gets a start. But the oriental varieties will do well here. I also have been able to produce 12 varieties of pine nuts and all are highly palatable."

Corsan has gathered his seeds from all over the world, and just as soon as he hears of a strange nut off goes his order for seed stock. "Nut tree culture has been neglected in the past," says Corsan, "but there is no reason why this should hold true today. The product always brings good prices, and it is an important item of food. Any one desiring any interesting and profitable undertaking can't go wrong taking up nut tree culture," he concluded.



Japanese walnuts produced by Corsan at his experiment station. Note the tropical-like foliage and the heavy fruit clusters.



Above: Some of the nuts produced at Islington, Ont., by George Hebden Corsan. They are all exact size. First, the Carpathian Giant Circassian Walnut. Second, the river bottom hickory. Third, the hican, a cross between the hickory and pecan. Fourth, the filbert and fifth, the tree hazel. Below is a cluster of Chinese sweet chestnuts. This chestnut does well in America while our native is subject to blight.

